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The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
J. H. OLDHAM

No. 94 AUGUST 13TH, 1941

DEAR MEMBER,

A statement entitled *Why Christian Education Matters*[1] has been issued by the recently formed Christian Education Movement advocating reforms in religious education in schools. These are substantially the same as those referred to in C.N-L. No. 65. The proposals have been approved by the leaders of the Churches and have received the support of 224 members of Parliament in a declaration that has been sent to the Prime Minister and the President of the Board of Education.

The statement wisely makes it clear that no attempt on the part of the Churches to impose their own demands on the nation can hope for success and that a Christian education can come about only through a co-operative effort of the Churches and the whole body of teachers and administrators with the intelligent support of parents. It also recognises that the proposed reforms in religious education, while useful and necessary, will not achieve what is needed without a thorough re-thinking of the philosophy and social implications of education.

As we proceed along these lines it will be necessary to distinguish with increasing clearness the *twofold* interest which Christians have both in education and in the social order. A Christian education means not one, but two distinct things. The one is a good human education, that takes account of the true nature of man as understood in the light of the Christian revelation ; and the second is a specifically Christian education, which includes instruction in the facts and doctrines of Christianity, the challenge to Christian decision and help in living the Christian life. The first has to be striven for in every society; how far in a mixed society the second can be embodied in a public system of education depends on the attitude to Christianity of the community as a whole.

In the declaration by members of Parliament it is stated that what is at stake in the war is the establishment of truth, justice and freedom, which are the elemental principles of a Christian philosophy of life, as the foundations of a better social order. This is true but the statement needs clarification. Christianity undoubtedly demands the practice of these virtues, and the teaching of Christianity in schools may be expected to foster them. But they are neither the sum of Christianity, nor peculiar to it. They have been, and are, esteemed and practised by non-Christians. They are moral values necessary in some degree to the existence of any society.

There are in fact two valid grounds for resisting Nazism. The one is that it is inhuman, and the other that it is un-Christian. The second is for Christians the fundamental reason, but the first is also true, and is one on which in the political sphere Christians and non-Christians can unite. To put it positively, we need, both for society and in education, a common national purpose which is based on respect for the natural virtues and can for this reason claim the support of both Christians and non-Christians, and which is at the same time leavened by the deeper Christian understanding of man's needs and possibilities.

In making up its mind about educational policy the nation, as the statement issued by the Christian Education Movement rightly insists, is confronted with a vital *decision*—

[1] Press and Publications Board, 2 Great Peter Street, Westminster, London, S.W.1.

the decision whether it will commit itself to a this-worldly or a religious view of man's nature and destiny. What we need to see clearly is that a right decision in regard to religious worship and teaching in the schools, immediately opens up a further task. This is the task of making sure that the form and activities of the common life of society, in which Christians and non-Christians share, are not a flat denial of Christian worship and teaching but allow room for Christian living and are open to the penetration of Christian ideas. To approach this task, as we constantly do, by asking how much of the Christian ethic we can introduce into the life of society is to frame the question wrongly at the start. The demands of the Christian ethic are addressed to those within the Church. They can be applied to a society, the majority of whose members have not yet understood or accepted, or who consciously reject, the Christian faith, only by being watered down to a humanitarian ethic which is no longer Christianity. This is what actually happens when we begin by asking the wrong question. The questions we have to ask are, What is the true nature of man? What are the purposes which accord with that nature? These are the questions that concern us in the social and political sphere. What Christians have to do is to see that the answers to them are challenged, vitalised and deepened by impulses inspired by the Christian faith.

WORKING WITH OR FOR?

A point raised in a letter from one of our members with a long experience of social work is deserving of mention, since while few would dispute it in theory it is constantly forgotten in practice. During the last war she started a Babies' Welfare Club, working with and through the mothers, forming a mothers' committee, discussing every step which it was proposed to take, asking for suggestions, hearing grouses and holding competitions. With time a change has come over the spirit of the club. Many self-sacrificing workers remain but they have lost the idea of working *with* instead of *for* mothers. They have become a small band of unpaid workers carrying out the official work under the Ministry of Health and Health Visitors. The Club is still doing good work which is most necessary for public health ; maternal and infant death rates are declining. But it is no longer training the women in self-reliance and public spirit or helping them to grow mentally and spiritually as individuals, as mothers and as citizens.

The writer of this week's Supplement graduated in medicine at Edinburgh in 1932, and went to China as a medical missionary. Since his return he has lectured for the Moral Welfare Council of the Church of England and in the course of his travels throughout the country has seen a good deal of the conditions in the Services.

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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SEX, WAR AND SOCIETY

By the Rev. GILBERT RUSSELL, M.B., Ch.B.

This is a subject which evokes, in the majority of people, one of two reactions. There are those who dismiss it with a shrug of the shoulders and a reference to the fact that " war is war "—meaning that sexual licence has always gone hand in hand with war, and presumably always will : there is nothing to be done about it. Others, sometimes less accurately informed about what really is happening in this field, are more deeply horrified by what they hear, and clamour for some sort of action by every kind of authority. In theory, perhaps, there is more to be said for this attitude than for the first—but not much more.

THE CREATIVE IMPULSE

There is little point in rehearsing the causes of the distortion and damage to relationships between the sexes, through their whole range, which war involves—so far as these are external. Conscription (applied now to women too), evacuation, the break-up of the normal pattern of society and the natural pattern of the family—these, and their effects, are obvious enough. The inner—often unconscious—motives are more significant, if only because they are not " accidental " in any sense which is true of the former. There is, for example, undoubtedly at work a powerful drive in the unconscious which impels men and women to compensate for all the slaughter, for the wholesale organisation of destruction in which we are all involved, by extraordinary creativity. This is true of almost any situation which precipitates loss of life on a large scale (e.g., earthquakes, fulminating epidemics). Men and women are meant to be creative—we are by nature disposed to reproduce ourselves in what we are doing. What we call " sex " is simply that energy of reproduction ; and, as with all instinctive energy, it cannot be merely obliterated. Some outlet it will find, and that (unless it be wholly perverted) on some level of creativity. We need to ask ourselves how far the superficiality and irresponsibility which have characterised the sexual relations of many young people in recent years may be due to the fact that large numbers of them are tied to industrial and mechanical jobs in and through which they cannot possibly " reproduce themselves." When we speak of the need for work to be " creative," it is often with the suggestion that where it is not so, men are simply denied what ought to be a living experience. That is only half the truth. It is not merely a lack, a deprivation that is involved. but a positive frustration of nature, a diversion of energy from its proper ends to false ones.

In this, as in so much else, the war has merely underlined lessons we did not learn in the days before the war : they are the same lessons. When, in a public shelter, men and women not normally disposed to licence fall to promiscuous sexual behaviour while a " blitz " is roaring round them, they are only doing what thousands of young people were driven to do in pre-war days—attempting to find in this intense experience a momentary refuge from the nightmare of insecurity surrounding them. I say " driven " deliberately, in order to suggest a measure of real irresponsibility. Responsibility is never absolute ; it is always conditioned by circumstances, capacity, experience, and so on. Soldiers coming out of the line after being dive-bombed for days on end, sailors coming ashore after months at sea, and (now) civilians who have lived through the destruction of their cities, are not in the same control of their sexual impulses as men normally are in a peace-time society. There is a compensatory reinforcement of the natural motion to create. To admit that is not to condone sexual licence ; but it is to understand it more completely.

This analysis may be criticised on the ground that at the very centre of such experiences and relationships creativeness is frustrated because of the deliberate intention to prevent the birth of children. But you do not prevent, or indeed alter, an instinctive urge

merely by frustrating it. A man may (and in the past did) frustrate the aggressive intention of his adversary by wearing a suit of armour ; but he does not thereby *prevent* (he only thwarts) his opponent's impulse to aggression. It is important to recognise that men and women are to-day more at the mercy of deep unconscious forces than they have been for many generations ; and this is true even when, as often, these appear on the surface in frivolous, or wanton, or perverted forms. There is as well another factor to take into account—one to which Rauschning has drawn attention in his recent book : a weariness of civilisation itself, an impatience with its restraints and burdens, a rejection of moral patterns which seem to have no relevance except to a dead past or a future so remote as to have no conceivable bearing on what we do to-day and to-morrow.

CONDITIONS IN THE SERVICES

This steady pressure towards irresponsible behaviour bears upon men and women in the Services more, perhaps, than on others. Military organisation, the rapid transfer from group to group, even the wearing of a uniform, all tend to submerge individuality—and so to diminish the sense of personal responsibility. One is cut off from families and friends to whom one owed, as a debt, the maintenance of certain standards, and one becomes a member of another group to which one at first " owes " nothing, to which one is bound by no personal obligations at all. In the ordinary way we live always against a background which determines, far more than we are aware, what we do and refrain from doing. For thousands of young people, war has removed the background—more accurately, has moved them away from it.

Beside this must be set the measures which medical authorities deem necessary for the maintenance of health among the troops. In view of the enormous number of men (estimated to have been equivalent to two divisions *a day*) who in the last war were incapacitated by venereal disease, it is natural that medical officers should devote a good deal of attention to combating these infections ; and it is from every point of view imperative that they should do so. But we need to be alive to the possible consequences of instructing every young recruit how he may indulge in promiscuous sexual relations with the minimal risk of acquiring venereal disease. Of course it is not always—one would like to believe, not ever—put as crudely as that. But there is plenty of evidence that to many, and especially to younger men, the discovery that the Army assumes and provides for sexual promiscuity comes as a great shock. It is necessary to understand the official view. The Army medical officers are rightly determined to prevent the appalling amount of sickness and damage (military, social, domestic, personal) which occurred in 1914–20, and the succeeding years, from this one cause. Their concern—quâ medical officers—is with the fighting fitness of the Army, and only with that. On the basis of past experience they expect, among the men for whom they are responsible, a measure of promiscuity—habitual in some cases, occasional in others. It is their business as M.O.s, to see that the incidence of venereal disease which results from this behaviour is as small as they can make it.

This is the point at which Christians, as Christians, have a duty to do some thinking. Few of us will be competent to judge the purely medical issue, and say whether the measures in force are in fact the most efficacious that can be applied. But many of us could find out, if we wished to, what effect these medical injunctions have had on the minds of those who are subject to them. How widely is it known, for instance, that units of the women's services have demanded why it is thought necessary to protect men against the consequences of irregular sexual behaviour, and not women : if prophylactics are available for soldiers, why not contraceptives for women in uniform ?

The evidence of widespread sexual demoralisation is impressive and has of course produced a good deal of astonished and indignant comment. But what did people expect ? That it would be now demonstrated that the homes and schools of this country in the past twenty years had after all been capable of equipping those growing up in them to face undismayed a situation like this ? For some young people, it is true, the war is doing what homes and schools and youth organisations manifestly failed to do—it is giving them a real experience of community. But that so many are apparently content to live and move on such superficial levels of friendship, and are unaware, it seems, that more is possible, is itself a commentary on the society which shaped their lives.

IRRESPONSIBILITY IN PERSONAL RELATIONS

It is precisely this superficial character, rather than the specific immorality, of so many relationships between men and women,

that is the proper starting point for any discussion of the sexual disorder of our society. Where sexual intercourse is regarded by two people as no more than " the most amusing indoor sport," as "something they do" whenever they are left alone together, it is clear that the relationship is fixated at a physical level, and hardly stands a chance of acquiring depth, of becoming really and fully *personal*. It is merely sexual, as other relationships in life are merely economic, or merely technical. In a court of law it is described as " intimacy " ; but that is just what it is not !

One must ask again : what is the alternative ? Was any " more excellent way " pointed out to these young folk by the society which bred them ? What other (i.e., other than physical) modes of expressing mutuality are possible for, say, a boy and girl who live in a Tyneside slum ? It is easy to speak of personality, of mental and spiritual affinity and companionship, and so forth ; but it is not so easy to translate them into terms which apply to Bill and Lizzie who are " walking out "—or to Corporal Jones and the lass he takes to the pictures. What lively and vigorous expression of their relationship, beyond the physical, is really open to people whose background, environment and interests —still more, whose means of expression—are limited in the extreme ? In other words, does the description " superficial " take realistic account of the bounds within which a relationship between two such people is compelled to move, and has it any real meaning except as part of a critique of the society which has produced them ?

A further question is this : How far does this " emptying " of sexual relationships—their reduction to mere mutual stimulation and excitement (Lawrence's " cocktail attitude ")—lead inevitably to the debauching of *all* human relations ; how far does it set in train a progressive debilitation of the *capacity* for fruitful and significant friendships, of any kind ? It is interesting to hear of a left-wing group in one of the universities which, having encouraged the maximum of sexual freedom among its members, came to accept an almost ascetic rule and discipline precisely because the experiment in " freedom " showed that, at that level, not only sexual but all relationships lost most of their significance.

In this situation, what is to be done ? Some thoughtful people would say simply, Nothing. And if there has to be a simple answer, it is that. Nothing can be done about sex problems, because they are never just *sex* problems ; they are always something more.

FAITH AND FIDELITY

At bottom, the recovery of health in sexual life, as in all else, is a matter first of *faith*. All superficial and promiscuous sexual acts are acts of *infidelity*—both as cause and as effect. For faith, a large part of our society has substituted a belief in *fate* as the arbiter of love-affairs. The Christian view of marriage is steadily sinking below the horizon. The schoolgirl notion of a " soul-mate " —the person with whom I am destined to fall in love—is, though not explicit, very widely accepted by young people in their approach to marriage ; and it is, of course, implicit in the Hollywood dogmas. It is an essentially acquisitive idea ; for (as M. de Rougemont has said in his book " Passion and Society ") it substitutes *affinity* for fidelity as the proper basis of marriage. By what do I judge, as between this person and that ? Only by reference to a sum of qualities—*A* is this, that, and the other ; *B* is this not that. Therefore I plump for *A*. (Of course it is not so conscious, calculated, or—thank God—cold-blooded as that ; but it is there.) The seeds of infidelity are palpably within this process. If the beloved is present as a number of desirable attributes, and no more, he (or she) is always in danger of being supplanted by somebody more richly endowed. This is what happens, in the film, the novel, and in actual life : it is the " leitmotif " of the divorce-courts. " I must be free to develop my own personality "—and my present partner frustrates that laudable design. The very idea of fidelity is something which increasingly " stands athwart the stream " of values which nearly everybody holds.

The regeneration of our society can only come about by a recovery of faith ; and it is not suggested that it is possible to inject into it now a creative idea about sex (really, about marriage), or that, if it were possible, it would of itself have regenerative power. A man who is sick must recover as a whole ; and societies are the same. Nevertheless, faith must be faith in *something* ; and there is a clear case for beginning at a place where disillusion and despair have, more even than elsewhere, done their perfect work. For years our society has not had enough faith even to regenerate itself in the literal and physical sense of the word. Most of my contemporaries would deny that it was a question of faith at all : it is simply a matter of reason.

Look at the world (they say)—at the prospect for English society in the next twenty years or so ; and ask yourself whether it is likely to be the sort of place in which you want your children to grow up. And of course at that level of argument there is no answer. You cannot reason people into the will to have a child. That is always an act of faith—and to have a child now is perhaps as great an act of faith as is conceivable (obviously I exclude haphazard and reluctant parenthood).

WHAT CAN BE DONE

There are two things which ought to be done, and can be done, to help those young people of both sexes who must, inevitably, take most of the strain of the war at this point. There is first a purely educational task—the business of explaining what Christian standards are to men and women who hardly begin to understand them ; of demonstrating (so to say) that they are not, what most people suppose them to be, a code arbitrarily imposed to gratify authority in Church and State, but are precisely the minimal conditions, and essential disciplines, without which there is no possibility of any real fulness, freedom, richness, or blessedness, for any community of men and women or, in the long run, for anybody in it : that they are, in a word, the dynamic medium of our proper life. And we should not be slow to use the massive evidence accumulated by doctors, psychologists, sociologists and others, in support of our thesis ; for it is this kind of evidence alone which will weigh with many of those to whom we speak.

Secondly, Christian people everywhere can help to secure conditions of social intercourse and recreation which will of themselves do much to set the level of personal relations among those who meet in them. It is a great mistake to regard club and canteen work as unimportant, to be left to purely secular agencies. And it is worse than mistaken for Christian people to complain of the misbehaviour of soldiers and airmen " off duty," when they have done nothing themselves to provide for, or contribute to, recreation and companionship for the soldiers' leisure hours.

Such provision and companionship may make a world of difference to the whole life of a soldier. A Territorial battalion, billeted for many months in a Midland village, was presented at the end of its stay with a letter from the parish council thanking the men for their admirable behaviour and the extremely happy relations that had existed between them and the villagers, and regretting their impending departure. At another village, not very far away, a similar " occupation " resulted in hostility, ill-will, mutual recrimination, and numberless accusations of theft, seduction and abuse. Yet the only difference, so far as one may judge, was that in the first village the soldiers were welcomed as friends, invited to share the homes and meals of the villagers, and treated rather as sons than as strangers. If a soldier went for a walk with a village girl, she took him home to supper afterwards. In the other village, she was told " not to go bringing that —— soldier into the house "; and it is not to be wondered at if the —— soldier felt less responsible for the girl herself and the good name of her family than did the soldier in the other village who was treated like a son of the house.

When the natural pattern of sex relations—the normal sequence of friendships, falling in love, marrying and starting a home and family—has suffered violent dislocation or been postponed to a future " after the war," which must appear so remote as to have little or no hold on the imagination, it is worth while to take infinite pains, and even considerable risks, if we may give help and hope to people who desperately need both. The best that is now possible for them in this realm of sex is (as they very well know) less than they may claim to have had a right to expect. There can by definition be no substitute for what is natural. The most we can say is that some alternatives are better than others. It is our business to find out what they are.

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